



# FrontLineSupervisor

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A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

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<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eap.html>

■ **One of my employees likes to engage horseplay such as play kick-boxing. I admit he is sometimes amusing; however, co-workers find him distracting and sometimes a bit threatening. Can the EAP help him compose himself?**

**The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you** work with your employee to foster appropriate behavior. It is important to be clear with your employee regarding your expectations and concerns. It is crucial to be clear that his behavior is not acceptable to you as his supervisor and that it is considered part of his job performance in future performance appraisals. Consider the risk of allowing him to continue his on-the-job horseplay. In a recent Denver case, a bakery worker who pretended to kick a coworker wound up slipping and injuring his wrist and developing a hernia. The Colorado Appeals Court said he could receive workers' comp benefits, even though the injury resulted from his horseplay.

■ **I hired an employee, but she isn't a good "cultural fit" at our organization even though her work ethic is good and she's a nice person. Is this something the EAP can help me with? I feel stuck with this person.**

**When a new hire** doesn't mesh with the organizational culture, it's usually because the individual is used to working in a different environment with different values, people, and standards of acceptable behavior. Some employees have the ability to self-correct after an adjustment period. In your case, the EAP can work with your newcomer to compare your culture to her past workplaces. Through this process, she can identify how the behaviors that she developed in past jobs may no longer work to her advantage. For example, an employee may have been accustomed to giving opinions and reporting observations about others' work freely, but within a new work culture, communicating concerns should be done differently through prescribed channels. Employees are often capable of making changes more readily than many supervisors think. This makes referral to the EAP a good move. Be clear about your concerns with both the EAP and the employee.

■ **I am a new supervisor and think I need to send an employee for a reasonable suspicion test for substance abuse. I am very nervous. What are the key issues in making such a referral without blowing it?**

**Review your documentation** in the employee's personnel file. Review your organization's policies and procedures and the collective bargaining agreement (CBA), for its testing program. Confirm that you have documented, observable evidence to substantiate the basis for your reasonable suspicion, such as firsthand observations including dates and times. Also document any instances where you've expressed your concerns to the employee-and what happened. As long as you can support your referral with a well-documented file, it will be easier to confront the employee with confidence. Be sure to work closely with your Human Resource

Consultant. You have a responsibility to your organization and employees to promote a safe workplace. Don't try to do this on your own. Work as a team including Management, HR, and EAP within the foundation of your policies and CBA where appropriate

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■ **I referred an employee to the EAP for his anger, but he refused to meet with an EA professional and said he just called the program and "chatted." I think this is serious and something has to change.**

**What matters most is** that the employee's job performance and behavior.

While you cannot mandate counseling or treatment, you can mandate appropriateness and effectiveness on the job. Hold your employee accountable for improvement, and take corrective action in accordance with your policies and CBA as needed if his anger resurfaces. Employees are under no legal obligation to agree to a supervisor referral to the EAP. But if they refuse to take these steps, they do not reap the full benefits of their involvement with and support from the EAP.

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■ **Our newly hired, recent college graduates are full of energy, but their adolescent style of talking (using "like" and phrases like "Oh, my gosh" continually) lacks professionalism. What's the solution so that we don't project an improper image to our customers?**

**You get what you measure.** Identify inappropriate words or phrases that you'd like your employees to avoid with customers. Then start counting the number of times they lapse into "teen talk" mode by observing your staff when they interact with customers. Also, alert your employees and your customers that you might monitor their phone calls for quality control. Even though you only face this problem with your new employees, make sure to enforce this with all your employees. This way, you cannot be accused of discriminating against the new hires. At the same time, invite your employees' feedback. They may come up with effective peer-driven ways to police themselves so they no longer speak like teenagers.

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## NOTES